SECOND HAND GAMING

INFLUENCE OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA BY METHOD OF CONSUMPTION

By

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Abstract: From its inception as a media form, video games have operated from one central, implied concept: that they were meant to be played. Games have been designed to be experienced directly by a player manipulating the game directly, or first-hand. Within the last decade, however, gaming has expanded to encompass a more second-hand method of consumption. Major broadcast networks show video games being played competitively to a global audience of millions, while independent content producers utilize "Let's Play" videos and streaming to generate millions of dollars in income, all in a manner not keeping with the intended first-person method of consumption games are traditionally designed for. Meanwhile, a majority of research in the field of gaming has focused on the effects the medium has had on children and youth, with a focus directed to societal concerns such as sex, violence, and drug use. This study engaged participants to interact with one game, *Stardew Valley*, through both first-hand and second-hand methods. The participants then completed a survey questionnaire designed to gauge their experiences and opinions with the game, which were analyzed to see if the method of consumption by which the game was played had a significant effect. The study simultaneously analyzed the data to determine whether other factors, namely gender and skill level, had a significant effect on those results.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the genesis of home video game entertainment as an interactive medium in the late 1970s, there have been few things to evolve the nature of the medium to the degree of social media. Over the past few years, traditional news media has chronicled the millions of dollars (Zoia, 2014) and influence wielded (Shields, 2015) by home-based content producers. These are people who simply record themselves playing video games with commentary, and upload them to video sharing Web sites such as YouTube, commonly known as “Let’s Play” videos.

Originally a niche product made primarily for the use and enjoyment of other players, “Let’s Play” as a source of mass entertainment and income for the producers of such videos did not come about until the rise of personalities such as Felix Kjellberg, otherwise known by the YouTube moniker “PewDiePie.” Beginning in his home in Sweden, Kjellberg would regularly upload videos of himself narrating his own play-throughs of popular titles, primarily exciting titles such as first person shooters, or weird indie games such as the Xbox title “Techno Kitty Adventure.” Even as Kjellberg and other “Let’s Play” producers profess that they do what they do for the love of games and their audiences, one cannot deny the financial allure for independent media content producers: Kjellberg reportedly can earn as much as $1.4 million in YouTube ad sharing revenue per month (Zoia, 2014), with all of the influence and reach to consumers that such figures bring.

The expanding influence of these Let's Play videos has been examined informally through the lens of popular culture. Two episodes of the popular American animated series South Park, which has been on the air for nearly two decades, were devoted to Let's Play and internet commentator culture (Parker, 2014a, 2014b). Let's Play as a format is a modern incarnation of what the researcher defines as second hand consumption of interactive media; the act of watching someone else consume interactive media, such as playing a video game. This project will attempt to measure and quantify the variation of influences interactive media has upon its user by the method it is consumed by; first hand or second hand, in an attempt to explore how the expansion of second-hand consumption of interactive media affects the media's influences upon the consumer within a framework of uses and gratifications theory. This project will focus on how the method of consumption affects the user's satisfaction and excitation with their experience, measured through a quantified score of their opinion of the media.

The origins of "Let's Play" and interactive media is traceable back to the beginning of video gaming as an interactive medium for entertainment. The first digital game, Pong, arose as the first such product to see widespread commercial success (Djaouti, Alvarez, Jessel, & Rampnoux, 2011), though digital games were created in the 1950s as a method for serious scientific research and computer development (Djaouti et al., 2011). The earliest video game, defined as an electronic game played by means of images on a video screen or other electronic display, first appeared in 1952 as *Noughts and Crosses*, a game created by Cambridge professor of computer science Alexander Shafto Douglas, played on Cambridge's *Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator* (Djaouti et al., 2011). Early forms of gaming remained primarily a novelty of academia and arcade-style machines until Magnavox introduced the first home console, the *Odyssey*, in 1972 (Djaouti et al., 2011). Early successes of the *Odyssey* and competitors such as the *Atari 2600* drove early interest in video gaming and interactive media, however video gaming as an in-home leisure entertainment marketed primarily towards children began with the Nintendo

Famicom in 1983 in Japan and, internationally, as the *Nintendo Entertainment System* in 1985 (Djaouti et al., 2011).

The remaining chapters in the research will offer a literature review, a methodological framework used in this study, findings and discussion. Chapter two will discuss (a) the history of interactive video game media and video based social media, (b) media influence, (c) non-interactive media, (d) foundational studies for this research, and (e) uses and gratifications theory. Chapter three details the sampling methods, participant recruitments and survey instrument used in this study. Chapter four details the findings of the study and provides detailed discussion of the results. Chapter five discusses the conclusions and implications of the study's findings, including discussion of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies in to the effects of video games and other forms of interactive media have focused primarily on the influence the medium exerts on society at large. While much of the research in to this field has focused on violence and aggression, particularly on audiences that interactive media primarily markets to, comparable research in to other forms of influence and how interactive media is experienced is lacking. Utilizing the existing body of research in media influence, this literature review will establish the basis for the researcher's research questions and hypotheses. This review will also examine interactive media within the framework of uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Lasswell, 1948), along with Lin (2013) and his research on levels of influence between interactive and non-interactive media, which also examined interactive media experienced through non-interactive means.

Interactive media, as defined by the researcher, refers to any form of media designed to relay thoughts, experiences, emotions, or storytelling elements, in a manner where the consumer's direct actions influence the media being delivered. Consumer generated content, as defined by the researcher, refers to forms of media produced outside of established industry systems, conventions and structures, primarily by independent producers or small teams.

History of Interactive Media and Video-Based Social Media

While interactive media has spent several decades establishing itself as a cultural cornerstone of global mass media, the ways people can consume interactive media began to expand with the advent of social media, and one platform in particular in YouTube. An early pioneer in video based social media turned industry standard, Kavoori (2015) presents YouTube as a single package composed as part storyteller, part myth-spinner, and part modern bard, in that the story of YouTube and the stories conveyed via YouTube are one and the same. YouTube, a primary source of consumer generated content, is unique in how it persists as a key element in how people frame their digital culture and their online experience (Kavoori, 2015).

One particular format for media presented through YouTube is the Let's Play style of video, produced primarily by independent content producers. In an analysis of one of the earliest such independent producers, Fleury concluded that it is the relationship between the medium of video games, and the content supplied through platforms such as YouTube, that allows these independent content producers to flourish and find acclaim (2012). James Rolfe, in his dramatis personae as the Angry Video Game Nerd, became one of YouTube's earliest success stories through the production of dramatic video game reviews for entertainment, focusing on early titles Rolfe considered poor (Fleury, 2012).

Alongside the expansion of Let's Play as a profitable venture for creative, independent content producers, has been the expansion of e-Sports and other mediums which rely on second-hand experiences of gaming for profit and gain. In 2016, Nielsen Sports Media cited e-Sports as one of the fastest categories of sports media with more than 45 million in audience size (Master, 2016). This audience, composed primarily of educated men ages 18 to 45 with high levels of income, has attracted advertisers such as Budweiser and Audi to sponsor teams and events of gamers playing *League of Legends* live on networks such as ESPN (Master, 2016).

Within the last decade, interactive media's presence within the framework of social media has led to studies on how this combination affects those who consume these works. Martin's study in to personal identity dynamics in the massively multiplayer online role playing game World of Warcraft concluded that non-traditional primary school students outside of common childhood social structures formed multifaceted identity processes that mirrored the dynamics of their information resources (Martin, 2012). Martin further posited that these identity processes applied to the real world as well, their online avatars a direct personification of the players themselves.

Media Influence

Research in to the effects of forms of media exerted upon their consumers extend back to some of the earliest documented research in to mass media and communication (Jarvis Jr., 1991). While the Payne Fund studies were subsequently found flawed by further research in to the field (Jarvis Jr., 1991), they served as a base from which further research in to the field has built itself upon, much of which has served to address concerns for younger segments of the population, particularly youth (Dillman Carpentier, 2013; Jarvis Jr., 1991). Research in to the effects of media on consumers have driven public policy and corporate decisions by media producers and industry groups for decades (Dillman Carpentier, 2013), however the ever evolving landscape of popular and cultural media, including the introduction and rise of mass interactive media, necessitates that research continues.

Like other forms of media, interactive media saw a major shift with the introduction of social media, a medium credited with profoundly changing the human experience (Correa, Hinsley, & Zuniga, 2010). In 2009, 75% of American adults reported using the Internet, while 93% of responding teenagers reported using the Internet at least once per day (Correa et al., 2010; Jones & Fox, 2009). Nearly all respondents reported using the Internet for communication

(Correa et al., 2010; Jones & Fox, 2009). Such nearly universal use of a single medium for communication across cultures and social classes gives rise to a venue for gauging public opinion on a global scale (Faletra, Palmer, & Marshall, 2014). Video-based social media services such as YouTube, present a challenge in that there is no easily identifiable ways to determine its dominant thematics, according to Kavoori (2015). Talpau (2014) posits that the tool set provided by YouTube provides new opportunities not previously available. While presented in a context of marketing, YouTube's public-driven content scheme applies the obvious advantages for communicating ideas and sharing amongst individuals and communities, providing for the presentation of media and ideas otherwise not accessible (Talpau, 2014). Opinions communicated through video-based social media can have varying effects dependent on multiple factors (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Online videos focusing on video games, including "Let's Play" format videos, were found to have greater influence on consumer opinions for less popular or well-known titles, for which alternative methods of marketing and promotion are not readily available, where even one negative review can have a severe impact for niche products sold on the unlimited shelf space of the Internet (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Further research suggests that existing popularity – a recognizable brand name, a venerated corporate identity, and so on – can directly influence the popularity of any given video, and vice versa (Khan & Vong, 2014).

A large portion of the research in to the effect and influence of interactive media independent of social media has focused primarily on its effect on children, particularly on aggression and violent behaviors (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson & Carnagey, 2009; Brockmyer, 2015; Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007; DeLisi, Vaughn, Gentile, Anderson, & Shook, 2013; Engelhardt, Bartholow, Kerr, & Bushman, 2011; Engelhardt, Hilgard, & Bartholow, 2015; Ferguson, 2011, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2015; Gunter & Daly, 2012; Hartmann, Krakowiak, & Tsay-Vogel, 2014; Hollingdale & Greitemeyer, 2014; Tear & Nielsen, 2013). Very little, comparatively, has addressed the influence and effect of interactive media on aspects other

than aggression and violent behaviors in situations where the interactive nature of the media is a primary consideration (Lin, 2013). While needs fulfilled by violent or aggressive behavior was established early on as one of four primary reasons players played video games (Bartle, 1996; Portnow & Floyd, 2015), it is only one dimension of the needs and desires fulfilled for players by gaming (Bartle, 1996; Dalisay, Kushin, Yamamoto, Liu, & Skalski, 2015).

Gaming is an activity associated with urban populations, with an excess of access to technology and home equipment, and with increased time for leisurely activity typically associated with first and second-world countries and economies (Borowiecki & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2015). As access and availability of gaming continues to expand, the potential of video games to add to the creation and evolution of cultural identity is unprecedented, in ways that researchers argue may be superior to old forms of mass media. (Borowiecki & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2015). For such an influential medium, the new and evolving role and impact of video gaming is often susceptible to judgement and prejudice from groups prone to making scientific and political claims on moral grounds, rather than grounds supported by data (Rothmund, Bender, Nauroth, & Gollwitzer, 2015). These morally-motivated views steer research in to examinations of the negative aspects of the medium (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson & Carnagey, 2009; Carnagey et al., 2007; DeLisi et al., 2013; Robinson, 2012), and less so on gaming's other influences and aspects (Molyneux, Vasudevan, & Gil de Zuniga, 2015; Rothmund et al., 2015).

That said, there has been a sizeable amount of research on video games and their wider influence beyond sex and violence. Gaming has been suggested by data-based results to improve cognition in participants (Buelow, Okdie, & Cooper, 2015). Other studies have indicated that gaming can foster initiative in youth in a positive manner (Adachi & Willoughby, 2012). Both researchers state that gaming's ability to develop social capital and further interpersonal and group skills are largely neglected by modern gaming research in favor of negative aspects (Adachi & Willoughby, 2012; Buelow et al., 2015). Whether discussing positive effects or

negative ones, however, the body of research suggests that gaming's influence is significant, even when the game itself is not being directly played by the user (Lin, 2013).

Non-Interactive Media

Like interactive media, much of the research in to non-interactive media has been focused on negative aspects such as influence on violence and aggression, particularly on youth and children (Ferguson, 2011, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2015; Markey, French, & Markey, 2015; Romer et al., 2014; Sargent et al., 2002; Strasburger, Donnerstein, & Bushman, 2014). Non-interactive forms of media marketed towards teens and young adults are focused on as being filled with objectively brutal and sexualized acts of violence (Sargent et al., 2002). While non-interactive forms of media have been suggested to be highly influential, from movies and television to mass media such as news and documentaries, there are several reasons researchers have suggested to explain why non-interactive media enjoys a lesser degree of scrutiny. This ranges from cognitive dissonance and refusal to believe the evidence, to examples and denials that seem to counteract the idea that non-interactive media can have a negative effect (Strasburger et al., 2014).

Research into non-interactive forms of media have also been heavily slanted towards the negative aspects, though examples do exist of research into other influences the format can have. Studies in India have suggested that visual, non-interactive mass media may contribute to an acceptance and desire to consume tobacco products (Viswanath, Ackerson, Sorensen, & Gupta, 2010). As viewing of non-interactive media expands to the online space, research has begun into the social construct social media offers. Studies of sports fans viewing matches online where they can directly interact and chat with other viewers have indicated that, despite being a non-interactive form of entertainment, the online social construct similar to that utilized by modern video games increases feelings and expressions of loyalty and affection to the participants' preferred teams and athletes (Ko, Yep, Lee, Lee, & Jang, 2016).

Do Video Games Exert Stronger Influence Than Film?

For the purposes of this study, Lin's *Do video games exert stronger effects on aggression than film? The role of media interactivity and identification on the association of violent content and aggressive outcomes* will be considered a foundational study (2013).

Lin's test was formulated to measure the influence of violent interactive media versus non-interactive media (2013). In this study, Lin examined affect, cognition, and physiological arousal of participants as dimensions of aggression. Participants were either assigned as a player of a segment of the 2009 video game title *X-Men Origins: Wolverine Uncaged Edition*, assigned to watch a pre-recorded segment of the same game played by someone else, or assigned to watch a segment of the 2009 movie *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* that mirrored the segment of the video game used (Lin, 2013). The purpose of this methodology was to compare a mediated enactive experience (first-person gameplay) against two forms of mediated observational experience (second-hand recorded gameplay and movie footage.) (Lin, 2013).

In an analysis of his results, Lin concluded that it was enactive experience that led to the most pronounced effect on aggression and aggressive feelings, and that recorded gameplay footage produced a higher effect on aggression than movie footage compared to the two tested observational experiences (Lin, 2013).

Though Lin provides a foundation for which the researcher can build a methodology above, the study proposed to expand Lin's research beyond the realm of aggression (Lin, 2013). Interactivity is an essential part of video games, however its effects beyond politically controversial or charged aspects such as aggression or sexuality are not well explored. As the expansion and growth of second-hand format experiences of games progresses, both popularly and financially, Lin's model provides a foundation for further examination of the differences in how consumption of interactive media in such a manner affects users, and popular culture at

large. Financial and user information from “Let’s Play” focused YouTube channels, which records millions of views and millions of dollars of income each year, along with the rapidly expanding audience for e-Sports and its lucrative possibilities for advertisers, demonstrates that this is not merely some niche phenomenon within video-based social media, indicating that the effects of this new form of consumption, and why users choose it, is worthy of further examination.

Uses and Gratifications

More than 75 years after the foundations of the Uses and Gratifications theory of communication, the need to understand why users choose the media sources they do remains a foundation of media theory research (Herzog, 1944; Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). While the first steps of defining Uses and Gratifications sought to understand the appeal behind soap operas on the radio, it established the first three categories of fulfillment that Uses and Gratifications has been built upon: emotional release, wishful thinking, and education (Herzog, 1944). Over time, the focus of research in to the theory has shifted from examination of what aspects of media limited its use, to examinations of how it is used (West & Turner, 2010). Unlike most forms of media and communication theory, Uses and Gratifications seeks to address what media is used for, rather than how media influences the users. Recently, this theory has been expanded to include research in to the emerging field of social media (Leung, 2013), of which YouTube and “Let’s Play” videos are a part of. The theory has also been tested in the realm of gaming, with a focus on the social networking aspects of online games (Wu, 2010). This study aims to examine the reasons why users of second-hand format experiences of video games choose to use interactive media in this way, which is counterintuitive to the first-hand nature of the medium’s stated and designed method of consumption.

At its core, Uses and Gratifications theorizes the reasons why people seek out specific media, and the needs they fulfill with said media (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Video gaming, by its very nature, is a form of media consumed primarily for entertainment purposes, without greater societal pressures or requirements for information as with other forms of media, such as news. This research best fits in to the Uses and Gratifications framework because it seeks to examine why people who consume interactive media second-hand do so, what needs that fulfills, and how they are fulfilled compared to interactive media consumed first-hand.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

As the literature review discussed, social media (Kavoori, 2015; Talpau, 2014) and video games (Borowiecki & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2015; Molyneux et al., 2015) both exert measurable effect on users and society at large. To date, research in to the effects of video gaming has been largely political (Rothmund et al., 2015) and focused on negative aspects (Molyneux et al., 2015). While video gaming as a subject of research has been extensively examined, it has been examined as a subject of direct, first-person interaction where the user is the subject playing the game. The concept of watching someone else play a game is nothing new, however it is the medium of video based social media and the "Let's Play" format in particular that has allowed this second-hand method of consuming interactive media to flourish into a platform that is unique in the world of mass media. With this in mind, I propose the first research question and hypothesis.

RQ1: Does the method of consumption affect the user's experience?

H1: The method of consumption will significantly affect the user's experience.

The other research questions attempt to look and account for additional factors which may affect how first hand and second hand experiences with interactive media. The second research question seeks examine the influence of gender.

RQ2: Does gender influence how method of consumption affect the user's experience?

H2: Gender will significantly affect how method of consumption affects the user's experience.

The final research question seeks whether experience with gaming influences the experience of interactive media first hand and second hand.

RQ3: How does a user's experience as a gamer influence how the method of consumption affect the user's experience with a game?

H3: More experienced gamers will be affected more by first-hand experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research was to examine how the method by which one consumes interactive media affects how they are impacted and influenced by that media. To examine how the method of consumption for interactive media influences participants, the researcher utilized a quantitative study using a direct manipulation, with an electronic questionnaire survey delivered electronically immediately following the manipulation. Surveys have already been established as an acceptable and widely used research instrument in media studies (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Correa et al., 2010). Surveys used in this research utilized Likert-type scales and multiple response questions to gauge participant opinions, habits, engagement, and attitudes regarding the game title utilized in the test.

Pilot Study

To establish the feasibility and validity of the researcher's methodology and procedures, a pilot study was conducted. A pilot sample of ten individuals personally known to the researcher were selected, with ten survey responses returned. Due to technical limitations, the pilot study utilized paper surveys, where the full study utilized an electronic survey. This study was utilized for practice for the researcher and feedback on the instrument, and its results were not included in this study.

Sample

All participants were students attending classes at a Midwestern university, selected as a sample of convenience. The researcher contacted the academic faculty of the school of media and strategic communications at this university, and received permission to recruit students from classes. The researcher spoke to classes directly. Participants were offered extra credit in their class equal to one percent of their total final grade. Students who did not wish to participate were offered a chance to obtain the extra credit by completing a writing assignment turned in to the researcher. Forty-one participants took part in the manipulation, with forty-one surveys returned, for a response rate of 100%.

Consent Form

The Institutional Review Board at the University at which the subjects were surveyed approved all study and consent form materials for this research. The manipulation and survey were all conducted in a university computer lab. An electronic consent form was the first screen after beginning the electronic survey, and the researcher required all participants to read and acknowledge their consent before participants paused the survey and took part in the manipulation. The consent form informed the subjects about (a) the title of the research project, (b) the researcher's name and contact information, (c) the nature and purpose of the research, (d) the approximate time it would take to complete the study, (e) a statement explaining that participating in the study was completely voluntary, (f) a statement explaining that participation in the study would involve minimal risk, and (g) a description of steps taken to ensure subject confidentiality. Any identifying information gathered would only be kept for the purpose of notifying instructors of their completion of the survey for the purposes of ensuring that they are assigned the extra credit offered for their participation, and that the information would be destroyed once it was no longer required. All participants were treated in accordance with the

ethical guidelines of the APA. All procedures met with the approval of the University Institutional Review Board.

Study Instrument and Measures

The questionnaire survey consisted of several variables used to examine the relationship between methods of consumption of the media used, the impact of the media upon the participant, and the experience level of the participant. The following section examines these variables.

Method of Consumption. First, the researcher divided the sample in to two groups. Group one consisted of participants interacting with the media in a first-hand method through direct gameplay on lab computers. Group two consisted of participants interacting with the media through a second-hand "Let's Play" video series consisting of two videos, played to the group on a lab-provided computer projector played from the researcher's computer station.

Aggregate Opinion Score. This was designed to quantify overall opinion of the media through the use of a multiple selection question. In this question, participants were presented an array of 16 descriptive words, and were asked to select all they felt applied to the media. Of those descriptors, 12 were designed to represent either a positive or a negative impression. The remaining four descriptors were not included because they did not represent a positive or negative impression, or were a replication of a descriptor already included. Six descriptors were positive, six were negative. The researcher generated an opinion score based off of responses to this question, with positive responses adding one point, and negative responses removing one point. The resulting ratio variable has a minimum score of zero, and a maximum score of six.

Experience level. In order to further examine impact, participants were asked to rate their skill level with video games by assigning themselves a category set on a five-point Likert scale. These were (a) I don't play, (b) amateur, (c) moderate, (d) skilled, and (e) professional.

The survey consisted of 43 total items, asking questions in the following areas: (a) entry and credit demographics, (b) prior experience with *Stardew Valley*, (c) game play habits, (d) game stream/watching habits, (e) game preferences, (f) opinion of *Stardew Valley*, and (g) demographics.

The first section, "entry and credit demographics," asked the participants three questions requesting their name, their instructor's name, and their group number, which was provided by the researcher. This was to ensure that the proper instructor was notified of the participant's completion of the study for extra credit, and to allow the researcher to easily categorize the survey responses by group number, which represents method of consumption, assisting with the answering of all Research Questions. The second section, "prior experience with *Stardew Valley*," consisted of a single question asking if the participant had interacted with the title used prior to the study. This question was chosen to establish additional data that may have been needed by the researcher.

The third section, "game play habits," consisted of three questions asking participants if they were regular game players, their skills with games, and how much time was spent per week playing games. These questions were asked to answer Research Question 3, "How does a user's experience as a gamer influence how the method of consumption affect the user's experience with a game?" The fourth section, "game stream/watching habits," consisted of two questions meant to gauge participants' preexisting habits with consuming media second hand, and to determine the number of hours per week they did so. This was asked to provide a more rounded set of data for possible future analysis.

The fifth section, "game preferences," consisted of 15 questions split between two parts. The first question asked participants to identify their preferred genre of video games. Questions two and three asked participants to give their opinion on violence in games and its importance to

their choices in gaming. The remaining questions provided participants with phrases designed to obtain data on their preferences of games, which they would rate for veracity on a five point Likert scale. These questions were asked to develop a more rounded set of data for possible future analysis.

The sixth section, "opinion of *Stardew Valley*," consisted of 12 questions designed to measure participants' opinions of the game following the manipulation. Question one asked if participants liked *Stardew Valley* based on their experience. Questions two through 10 asked participants to rate phrases designed to measure their opinions and impressions of the game on a five-point Likert scale. Question 11 asked participants if they thought their opinion would be different if they were introduced to the game in a different manner. The final question asked participants to select from a list of single word descriptors all which they felt applied to *Stardew Valley*. These questions were selected to help answer all Research Questions, and to provide a more rounded data set for possible future analysis.

The final section, "demographics," asked participants standard demographical questions regarding their age, race, gender, income, educational level, and marital status. These questions were used to gather demographical information, and to help answer Research Question 2, "Does gender influence how method of consumption affect the user's experience?"

Procedures

Participants were instructed on arrival at the testing location to log on to a lab computer's Windows 10 partition and to navigate a web browser to a shortened URL displayed by the researcher on the classroom projector, along with the group's group number. Participants were instructed to complete section one of the survey, then to stop. Once all participants had done so, the researcher provided instructions to proceed based on the group designation.

For the first-hand group, the researcher instructed participants to minimize the survey window and to launch the game using a shortcut icon on the desktop. Once participants were loaded to the title screen, the researcher informed them that they would have 30 minutes from that point to play the game as they saw fit, including character creation, introduction, and gameplay. The researcher set a timer utilizing a cell phone to measure time expired. Once the timer sounded, the researcher instructed participants to stop playing and to complete the survey. The researcher observed participants to ensure that the game was being played and that play stopped when instructed.

For the second-hand group, the researcher instructed participants to turn their attention to the classroom projector. The researcher played two publicly available YouTube videos of a *Stardew Valley* Let's Play series independently produced by Let's Play content producer group *Game Grumps* (O'Donovan & Kramer, 2016a, 2016b), totaling approximately 27 minutes. The videos were played back to back, with no intermission between them. Following the completion of the second video, the researcher instructed participants to complete the survey.

Once all group study sessions were complete, the researcher downloaded the response data from SurveyMonkey in both Microsoft Excel and SPSS format, and created a codebook for data compilation and entry. Once all data was entered and compiled within SPSS, the researcher used independent samples *t*-tests and sequential regression to determine statistical significance of the data. Alpha was set, $\alpha = .05$.

Data Analysis

Missing variables accounted for 0% of the data, so no steps were required to account for missing variables. The assumption of normality was assessed visually and utilizing descriptive statistics. Histograms and Q-Q plots indicated only slight to modest skew for most variables. All variables either fell within academic standards for skewness and kurtosis, or were validated

through application of the central limit theorem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 71). The variables were also screened for homogeneity of variance utilizing Levene's Test for Equality of Variance. The result was not significant. Thus, all assumptions for grouped statistical analysis have been met, and tests can proceed.

Reliability and Validity

Internal validity and reliability was established utilizing inter-question reliability, and by utilizing techniques and procedures developed by previous research in the field (Correa et al., 2010; Lin, 2013). Internal validity will also be supported by a direct relationship between the questions and responses found in the instrument, and the independent and dependent variables being studied.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Through a direct manipulation followed by survey research, the goal of this study was to determine how changing the method of consumption for interactive media affected the opinions and experiences of the user consuming the media. Additional goals of this research were to determine if additional factors, such as gender and experience level with gaming, influenced these opinions once method of consumption had been accounted for.

Sample

The researcher collected 41 questionnaire responses from participants enrolled at a Midwestern university, following a manipulation session conducted in a University computer lab. Data was screened for missing variables, outliers, and normality prior to being analyzed utilizing SPSS statistical software provided by the University. Of the 41 participants, 41 completed questionnaires were collected, for a response rate of 100%. Of the 41 participants, 9.4% (n = 4) had prior experience with *Stardew Valley*. Furthermore, 43.9% (n = 18) reported at least sometimes preferring to experience video games through second-hand means, while 4.8% (n = 2) reported regularly preferring second-hand consumption. Of the participants, 60.9% (n = 25) were female, with the remaining 39.1% (n = 16) reporting as male. On age, 97.5% (n = 40) were aged 18-24, with 2.4% (n = 1) reporting to be age 25-30. Ethnic makeup of the sample was 73.1%

Caucasian (*n* = 30), 9.4% Asian (*n* = 4), 7.3% Black (*n* = 3), 7.3% Native American (*n* = 3), and 2.4% Non-White Hispanic (*n* = 1).

Method of Consumption and Experience

Research Question 1 sought to determine whether method of consumption significantly affected the user's experience with the media. Participants were asked to select which words applied from a list of descriptor words for *Stardew Valley*, six of which were positive (Nice, Exciting, Funny, Good, Uplifting, Happy,) and six of which were negative (Annoying, Aggravating, Confusing, Bad, Boring, Sad.) An opinion score was generated by assigning one point for every positive descriptor selected, and removing one point for every negative descriptor selected, with a minimum score of zero and a maximum score of six. This opinion score was analyzed against method of consumption, defined as first-hand participants and second-hand participants.

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted because the means of two unrelated groups were compared. Second-hand users, $M = 2.05$, has a higher mean opinion score than first-hand participants, $M = 0.89$, $t(39) = -2.11$, $p = .042$. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Eta is .320. This indicates a weak relationship according to Frankfort-Nachmias and Leon-Guerrero's guidelines. Eta squared is .102, indicating that method of consumption explains 10.2% of the variance in opinion score of the game. See table 4.1 and graph 4.1 for a breakdown of these results.

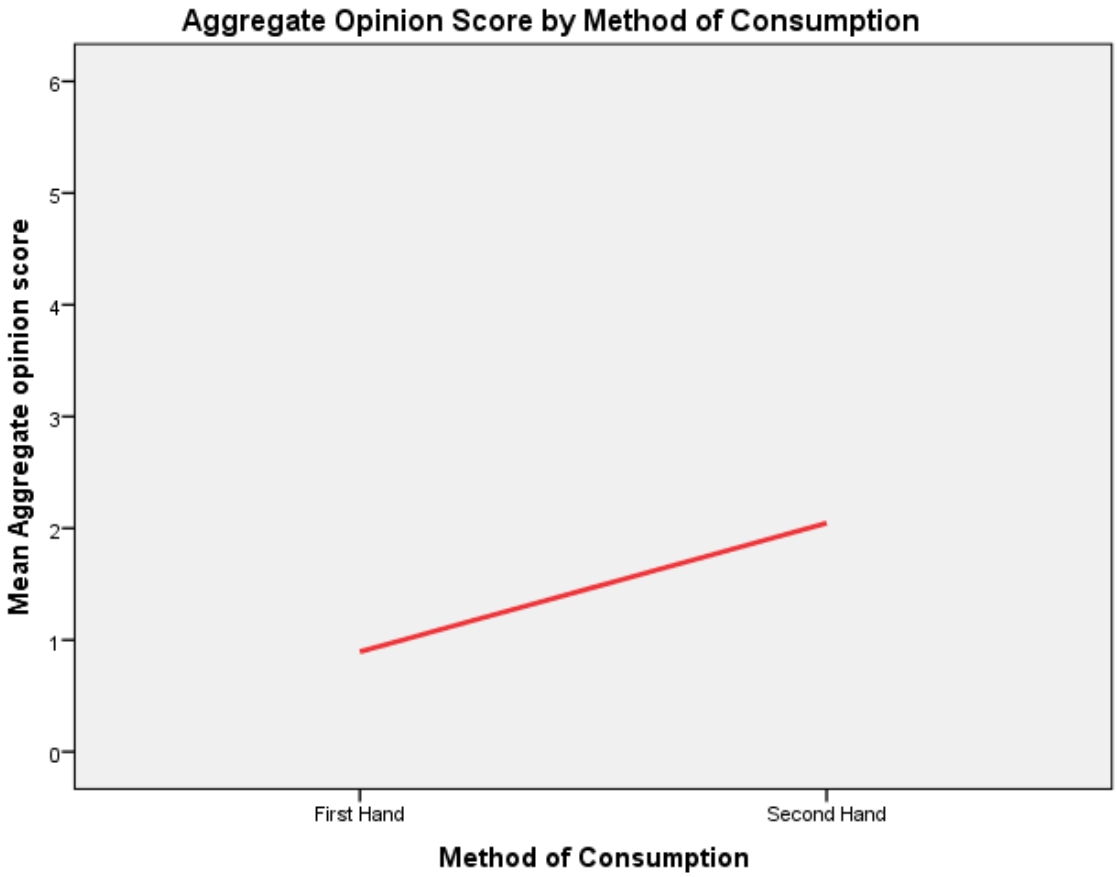
Table 4.1

T-Test comparing Method of Consumption by Aggregate Opinion Score

	n	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η	η^2
First Hand	19	0.89	1.329	-2.11*	.320	.102
Second Hand	22	2.05	2.035			

* $p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Graph 4.1



Research Question 2 sought to determine the influence of gender upon participant opinion and experience once method of consumption had been accounted for. Therefore, a sequential regression was performed. Model 1 examining the relationship between opinion score and method of consumption was significant, $p = .042$, $\alpha = .05$, accounting for 10.2% of the variation in opinion scores, $R^2 = .102$. $R = .320$, indicating a weak relationship. Model 2 indicates that adding gender did not produce a significant change in R^2 at .574, indicating that gender explained an additional 6.3% of the variance. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. See Tables 4.2 and 4.3 for more information.

Research Question 3 sought to determine the influence of skill level upon participant opinion and experience once method of consumption had been accounted for. Therefore, a sequential regression was performed. Model 1 examining the relationship between opinion score and method of consumption was significant, $p = .042$, $\alpha = .05$, accounting for 10.2% of the variation in opinion scores, $R^2 = .102$. $R = .320$, indicating a weak relationship. Model 2 indicates that adding skill level did not produce a significant change in R^2 at .077, indicating that skill level explained an additional 7.2% of the variance, .072. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. See Tables 4.4 and 4.5 for more information.

Table 4.2

Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

	OPINION	GROUP	GENDER
OPINION		.320*	-.162
GROUP			-.242
M	1.51	1.54	1.61
SD	1.818	.505	.494

*$p < .05$; p**< .01

Table 4.3

Standard Regression Table for Aggregate Opinion Score by Method of Consumption and Gender

Variables	*B*	*β*	sr^2 (unique)	*R* (model)	R^2 (model)	*Adjusted* R^2 (model)
GROUP	1.073	.30	.083	.331	.110	.063
GENDER	-0.330	-.08	.007			
	*Intercep*t = 0.394					

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

Table 4.4

Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

	OPINION	GROUP	SKILL
OPINION		.320*	.306
GROUP			.126
M	1.51	1.54	2.63
SD	1.818	.505	1.199

*p < .05; p**< .01

Table 4.5

Standard Regression Table for Aggregate Opinion Score by Method of Consumption and Skill Level

Variables	*B*	*β*	sr^2 (unique)	*R* (model)	R^2 (model)	*Adjusted* R^2 (model)
GROUP	1.073	.30	.083	.417	.174	.130
SKILL	0.409	.27	.071			
	*Intercep*t = -1.146					

*p < .05; **p < .01

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to attempt to fill a hole in the body of literature looking at how the a person consumes media in ways other than how it is intended to be consumed can affect the user's opinion and experience. Additionally, this research attempted to account for other possible factors that may affect the user once method of consumption was accounted for. With the rapidly growing popularity of second-hand consumption of interactive video game media, particularly through Let's Play-style entertainment videos, independent livestream play sessions, and organized e-Sports events that draw in millions of viewers around the world, the increasing relevance this form of consumption has on the video game audience cannot be understated. These findings are enhanced by the framework of Uses and Gratifications theory, which seeks to explore why people consume the media they do, what they get out of the experience, by showing that the use and gratifications one experiences consuming media second-hand differs significantly from what one experiences with a first-hand interaction.

The significance of these results suggest that second-hand users of *Stardew Valley* are left with a significantly different impression of the game than first-hand users, with the scores showing a higher overall mean opinion for second-hand users. Simultaneously, these results suggest that the outside factors of gender and skill level do not have a significant impact on these

results, further strengthening the idea that method of consumption has a significant impact on its own. Nielsen Sports Media research shows that this second-hand format of use for gaming is only growing stronger with time (Master, 2016), and as it continues to do so, it will continue to change how we as a society interact and grow with gaming as a medium.

Discussion

Survey responses indicated that participants who experienced *Stardew Valley* second-hand had a significantly more positive opinion of the game than those who interacted with the game directly, with 90.6% of participants having the study as their first exposure to the game, minimizing the influence of prior bias. By its very design, *Stardew Valley* is not meant to be thrilling or exciting, opting instead for a slow, casual experience provided to its player. Compared with titles commonly seen in e-Sports events, this suggests games like *Stardew Valley* do not lend themselves well to short interactions spread across wide general audiences. This suggests that the format found within the second-hand Let's Play-style video was at the heart of this difference of opinion, alongside the elimination of both gender and gamer skill level as significant factors. While further research could explore this interaction utilizing a title more suited towards a streaming or e-Sports style of interaction, the elements of what makes second-hand interaction, with Let's Play videos in particular, appear to be the influential factor.

These results keep with the results found by Lin (2013), in which his prediction that players would identify more with the main character than viewers of gameplay or film of the same events would was indicated to be incorrect. Identification with a character or other narrative element is also an indicator of experience, of how one interacted with the medium. Contrary to Lin's prediction, the simple act of experiencing the medium first-hand did not lead to increased identification. While Lin's findings did indicate that first-hand interaction did lead to heightened aggressive feelings, *Stardew Valley* is not an aggressive game, and would not be expected to

produce such reactions. As Lin's focus on aggressiveness does not apply to this study due to the differences in the game used, the similar findings between Lin and this study on how the method of consumption significantly affects the experience of the user is supported. As Lin suggested that interactivity affects experience through identification, this study suggests that interactivity affects experience through impact upon the user.

Let's Play videos are, first and foremost, an entertainment package, similar to a standard broadcast television product. Not only is the game being played for the viewer to watch, but the package is often enhanced with commentary from the person actually playing, along with graphics and other elements. The videos used in this study were purposefully humorous in nature, adding jokes and commentary beyond what naturally occurred within the game. While not always comedic in nature, commentary is a common feature in second-hand productions of video games, from independent Let's Play videos to professionally produced e-Sports. Further research could explore how much this additional formatting and content contributes to the interaction between user and media.

Implications

With the limited size and geography of the type of sample utilized, it is impossible to generalize the findings of this study. These findings indicate that the experience of video games changes significantly when experienced outside of its intended, first-person method of consumption. Furthermore, this second-hand method is financially lucrative, and appeals to a wide audience of varying ages, education levels, and incomes. As the gaming and entertainment industries continue to grow to address the demands of the audiences who desire this form of interaction, game designers and producers will have to consider the framework of their product outside of the natural, first-person perspective they expect their users to interact with the work. Bartle has laid the framework of why gamers play games (1996), and it has steered game design

and theory through multiple generations of technology and genres. This study suggests that in addition to considering why gamers game, developers and producers will also have to consider why gamers watch.

Limitations

It is important for this study to acknowledge the limitations that exist. First, no biometric data was gathered. As past research in to gaming has often relied on biometrics to gauge reaction and excitement by media, including video games, future research could utilize biometrics to obtain data that is not as reliant on participant self-reporting. Second, though the sample size was sufficient to produce valid, reliable results, the population of the study was limited to students at a single Midwestern university. With a broader, more generalized demographic, it is possible that the results of the study could have been affected, as this sample represents the population of the university, rather than the overall population. The same applies to how the age of the user could have influenced results, as all but one participant was under the age of 25. Third, *Stardew Valley* was selected as the title used because it was already owned by the researcher, and of low enough technical specifications that there would be no conceivable difficulty in running the software on lab computers at a quality found by the average user. The title is not a natural fit for the format normally found in e-Sports and livestreaming, compared to more popular e-Sports titles such as *Starcraft II* or *League of Legends*.

Directions for Future Research

With the foundation built by this study, in its methodology and procedure, future quantitative research could expand the sample size to be more representative of the overall population by geography and age to gather more accurate data. Utilization of another title more suited for second-hand interaction could be used to paint a more specialized picture. Furthermore, a wider range of demographics and other factors can be applied to determine whether they play a

significant role in how method of consumption influences the user's experience, beyond the factors of gender and skill level explored in this study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Test Instrument

What is your first and last name? (This is needed to ensure you receive extra credit.)

Who is your instructor?

- Danny Shipka
- Max Andrews
- Jack Hodgson

What is your group number? This will be given by the researcher.

- Group 1
- Group 2

Have you played or watched “Let’s Play” videos about “Stardew Valley” before?

- Yes
- No

Are you a regular game player or gamer?

- Yes
- No

Rate your skill level with games

- I don’t play
- Amateur
- Moderate
- Skilled
- Professional

How many hours do you play video games per week?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

Do you prefer to watch someone else play video games, rather than play yourself? This includes live streaming and “Let’s Play” videos.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

How many hours do you spend watching others play video games per week?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

What kind of video games do you like to play? Check all that apply.

- Action & Adventure
- Shooters
- Platformers
- Racing
- Sports
- Simulation

- Strategy
- Role Playing Games
- Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMO)
- Casual
- Puzzle
- Social & Party Games

Is violence an important factor in your choice of games?

- Yes
- No

Do you prefer violent games?

- Yes
- No

Please rate the following statements as you feel they apply to you

	1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly Agree
A game's story and narrative are important					
I play games to relax after a long day					
I play games to calm down when I am angry or upset					
I wish I had more time in my life to play games					
I have been playing games for most of my life					
I like watching other people play					

The only games that interest me are ones I regularly play myself					
I think I could play games with the pros, and win					
I play games because I want an experience that affects me emotionally					
I spend a lot of time on YouTube or Twitch					
The moment when an opponent loses is what makes a game a game					
A game would never be able to make me cry.					

Based on your experience today, did you like "Stardew Valley?"

- Yes
- No

Please rate the following statements regarding your experience with “Stardew Valley.”

	1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly Agree
I want to play it more than watch it					
The study ended too early, I want more					
I’m eager to play it for myself					
That was boring					
I would recommend “Stardew Valley” to someone who might want to buy it					
I want to go home and watch more videos and streams of the game					
This left me feeling sad or depressed					
I want to play “Stardew Valley” on my own time now					

If you experienced “Stardew Valley” differently (for example, if you watched a “Let’s Play” video instead of playing it), do you think your responses would have been different?

- Yes
- No

Please select all words that you feel apply to “Stardew Valley” based on your experience today.

- Nice
- Exciting
- Annoying
- Aggravating
- Confusing
- Funny
- Good
- Bad
- Boring
- Slow
- Fast
- Rage-inducing
- Depressing
- Uplifting
- Happy
- Sad

Gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

Age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-35
- 36+

Ethnicity?

- Caucasian
- Black
- Hispanic

- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Highest level of education completed?

- Some high school
- High school
- Technical/Trade school
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate

Marital Status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

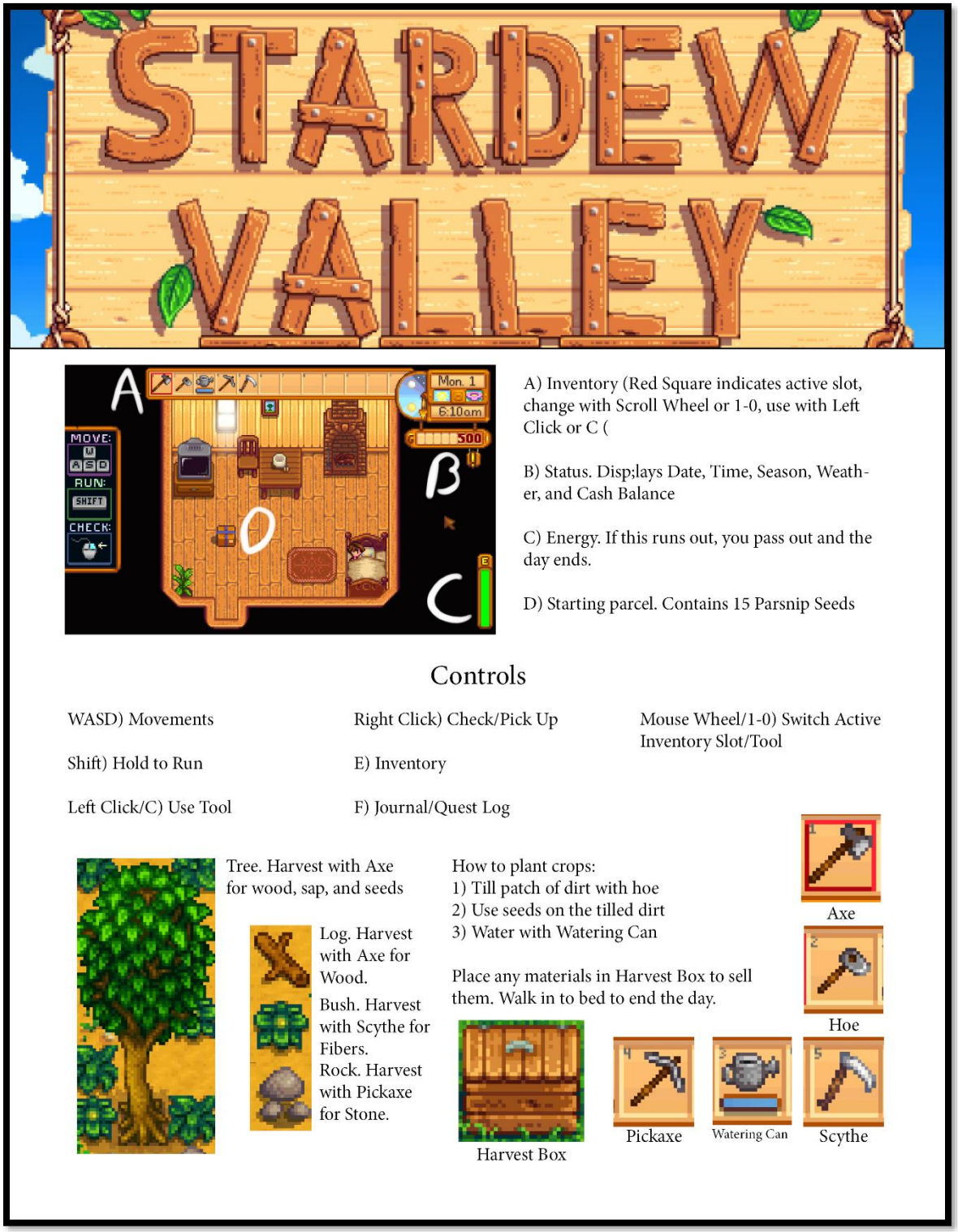
Employment status?

- Part-time
- Full-time
- Student worker/workstudy
- Active duty military
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Prefer not to answer

Annual income?

- Less than $10,000
- $10,001 - $24,000
- $24,001 - $30,000
- $30,001 - $40,000
- More than $40,000

Appendix 2 – Group 1 Game Instructions Sheet



A) Inventory (Red Square indicates active slot, change with Scroll Wheel or 1-0, use with Left Click or C (

B) Status. Disp;lays Date, Time, Season, Weather, and Cash Balance

C) Energy. If this runs out, you pass out and the day ends.

D) Starting parcel. Contains 15 Parsnip Seeds

Controls

WASD) Movements

Shift) Hold to Run

Left Click/C) Use Tool

Right Click) Check/Pick Up

E) Inventory

F) Journal/Quest Log

Mouse Wheel/1-0) Switch Active Inventory Slot/Tool

Tree. Harvest with Axe for wood, sap, and seeds

Log. Harvest with Axe for Wood.

Bush. Harvest with Scythe for Fibers.

Rock. Harvest with Pickaxe for Stone.

How to plant crops:
1) Till patch of dirt with hoe
2) Use seeds on the tilled dirt
3) Water with Watering Can

Place any materials in Harvest Box to sell them. Walk in to bed to end the day.

Harvest Box

Pickaxe

Watering Can

Scythe

Axe

Hoe

VITA

Bryan Michael Trude

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: SECOND HAND GAMING: INFLUENCE OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA BY METHOD OF CONSUMPTION

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Enterprise Development at Rose State College, Midwest City, Oklahoma in 2013.

Experience:

Graduate Assistant
Oklahoma State University, August 2015 – Present

- Performed technical writing, editing, and video production work for the Information Technology department.
- Developed curricula and lesson plans for in-department training for the Information Technology department.
- Developed, wrote, and publish stories promoting the College of Arts & Sciences. Develop graphical designs, layout, and publish mass email newsletters for college faculty and alumni. Shoot, edit, and publish photo and video material for college events. Provide labor and assistance for college events as needed.

Managing Editor/Reporter
The Newcastle Pacer – April 2013 – May 2014; Issaquah/Sammamish Reporter, September 2014 – December 2014

- Created and produced all stories for weekly newspaper publication
- Conducted multiple interviews for more than 100 published articles
- Maintained relations with and directed freelance writers, photographers, and videographers to meet 100% of weekly deadlines
- Directed and shot countless photo and video assignments for publication and commercial use